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ABSTRACT

A discussion of issues concerning the feasibility of conducting a Spanish version of the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) is presented. The discussion is based on a 1992 seminar to address linguistic, political, and logistic concerns in such an undertaking. While the experience with the NALS guided discussion, the primary focus was on special issues concerning a Spanish version: (1) purposes and uses of a Spanish NALS; (2) issues in task (item) development, including format, translation, language style or variation used, content, structure and nature; (3) relationship to other national assessments using similar constructs; (4) issues in pretesting and population sampling; and (5) scaling of tasks, i.e., similar to or different from tasks on the three (prose, document, quantitative) scales in the English version. In each of these five categories, the comments of practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and program evaluators participating in the seminar are summarized. The report concludes with recommendations for development of a Spanish version of the NALS. Appended materials include a list of seminar participants, and a participant feedback form. Contains 10 references. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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ED 370 451

Conducting a Spanish National Adult Literacy Survey: A Discussion of the Issues

April, 1994

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Table of Contents

I. Introduction/Rationale for Seminar 1

II. Organization and Purpose of the Seminar 3

III. Results of Discussion on a Spanish National Adult Literacy Survey 4

IV. Future Directions and Recommendations 13

V. Appendices 15

Conducting a Spanish National Adult Literacy Survey: A Discussion of the Issues

I. Introduction/Rationale for Seminar

The following is a "discussion paper" based on a seminar hosted by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) Southern California Field Office (SCFO), on the feasibility of conducting a Spanish version of the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS).

The SCFO decided to host this seminar because of the importance and timeliness of this topic. Data indicate that the non-English speaking population in the United States is growing and represents sizable numbers. Of the 31.8 million Americans who speak a language other than English, 17 million (54%) speak Spanish. This represents an increase of over 6 million since 1980 (Census, 1990; Macías, 1993). Spanish is the prevailing non-English language spoken in 39 states. Thus, the data show that a significant number of Americans (14%) speak a non-English language and our country may not be realizing the potential of a major segment of our society if we do not examine their literacy levels and resources.

Another important reason for the seminar relates to the capacity and ability of literacy service providers to accommodate and educate the growing numbers of non-English speaking adults. A recent publication of the U.S. Department of Education Office of Vocational and Adult Education (1991) notes the changing enrollments in federally funded programs. The report points out:

> *"Of the three components of adult education programs -- Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, and Adult Secondary Education -- ESL experienced the largest increase in enrollment, from 19 percent of total enrollment in 1980 to 34 percent in 1989 ..." (p. 14-15)*

Although the increase in non-English speaking adults has resulted in increases in ABE (Adult Basic Education) and ESL (English as a Second Language) enrollments in adult schools (as well as community and library-based programs), very little is known about their native language literacy levels and/or potential. Methodologies used in the past resulted in limited data on literacy levels. For example, studies usually examined self-reports on *bilingual* proficiency (ability to speak a second language), and not on reading and writing abilities -- two significant elements of literacy.

A third rationale for the seminar centers on the need to determine in more precise ways the literacy levels of non-English speakers in either English or their native language. For example, determining the extent of literacy of Spanish speaking adults has been difficult. The recent NALS report (Kirsch, et al., 1993) makes note of the fact that "twenty-five percent of the respondents who performed in this level (level I) were immigrants who may have been just learning to speak English." However, we do not know to what extent language played a role in their low English literacy levels, nor do we have any direct measures of their native language literacy levels.

We do know that adults who speak primarily another language other than English, do not do well on English language tests. For example, Vargas (1988) reports on data from the English Language Proficiency Survey (ELPS) that found that "... while 13% of the population 20 years of age and older was illiterate, 48% of adults whose native language was other than English were illiterate."

The National Chicano Survey (NCS) conducted in 1979 (and described by Macías, 1988) is unique in that it includes data on Spanish language and literacy (written use in the household) as well as on English. Data were gathered from a national sample of Mexican Origin households (with about 1000 respondents 17 years old and over) which utilized a bilingual questionnaire and interviewers as data collection methodologies. These data indicate that "... 26% of the Mexican origin population was not literate in English or Spanish in 1979. Approximately 32% reported literacy abilities only in English, while 20% reported biliteracy in English and Spanish, and 22% reported literacy only in Spanish" (Macías, 1988).

Using the number of school years completed for those 18 years and older as a surrogate literacy measure, different results emerge. "Of those who are classified as English illiterate ... 35% were literate in Spanish only" (Macías, 1988). Thus, the potential number of Spanish speaking adults who are literate in their native language can be relatively high, even though they have little English language proficiency.

Much of the data on non-English language literacy is self-reported, and self-reported data can yield mixed results. For example, Vargas (1988) reports that self-reported data used on the English Language Proficiency Survey (ELPS) found that 86% of adults from non-English backgrounds who were illiterate in English reported being illiterate in their native language as well. Stated differently, 14% were literate in Spanish compared to Macías' reported 22%. One explanation for the difference might be the fact that Macías analyzed the NCS which consisted of Mexican Origin respondents, whereas the ELPS data examined Hispanic -- with no subgroup breakdown.

One major improvement in this area comes from the current ETS NALS survey (Kirsch et al., 1993, mentioned above) which provides valuable information on self-reported literacy levels in a non-English language. In this survey, adults (oversampled for Hispanics) reported how well they felt they could speak, read and write in their native language.[1] Although still using self-reported data, this methodological design is a substantial first step since it includes speaking, reading and writing as literacy outcomes. Now the discussion has turned to the feasibility of conducting a *direct* assessment of adults who speak a non-English language -- in this case Spanish.[2]

The reader is reminded that this discussion paper raises the many issues associated with conducting a national adult literacy survey in the Spanish language. Since no direct national assessment of this kind had ever been conducted, participants tended to cover several issues and propose many ideas on how, why, and where such an assessment would take place. In fact, several significant ideas are presented in the following pages that will begin to set the framework and discussion for a Spanish version of the NALS. However, in the short time span that participants were together, (a day and a half), in-depth analyses of any one concern or area was difficult -- and several questions need further examination.

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[1] A special report titled "Literacy and Cultural Diversity" is forthcoming as part of the larger NALS report series.

[2] It should be noted that a "NALS type" assessment has already been conducted in the French language in Canada (a representative from this study was in attendance).

II. Organization and Purpose of the Seminar

In the Spring of 1992, the ETS Southern California Field Office (SCFO) hosted a two-day seminar to discuss issues related to developing a Spanish version of the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS). The SCFO staff wanted to address linguistic, political, and logistic concerns related to such an effort at this seminar. Adult literacy program evaluators and researchers, demographers, practitioners and policy makers were invited to share their thoughts on this topic. Individuals with experience and expertise in national adult literacy surveys were in attendance as well. Participants came from Mexico and Canada, as well as the United States, to discuss issues related to second language assessment of adults -- in this case -- the Spanish National Adult Literacy Survey. [3]

With this group of participants, ETS was able to begin to generate a framework for a Spanish NALS, and based on information gathered for this framework, provide recommendations that would assist in the development of a Spanish version of the NALS.

Since the discussion for a Spanish language assessment centered around methodologies used by ETS in past and present national surveys, it was important to describe ETS' efforts in this area to seminar participants. ETS SCFO staff felt that the current NALS survey would add tremendously to our understanding of a national assessment effort of this magnitude. As such, the Project Officer for the current National Adult Literacy Survey conducted by Educational Testing Service (Princeton) was in attendance and provided this information.

In an attempt to learn from previous efforts outside the U.S., ETS staff invited a representative from Canada where a "NALS type" assessment was conducted in October of 1989 by *Statistics Canada* on behalf of the National Literacy Secretariat. Also, feeling that a Spanish adult literacy assessment would be of great interest to Mexico, a representative from the Instituto Naciónal de Educación para Adultos (INEA) was invited. These two guests added an international point of view to the discussions.

Although the experience of the current NALS certainly guided our discussion, there were specific concerns about developing a Spanish version of the NALS that ETS staff wanted to explore in more detail. They are presented briefly below.

Purposes and Uses of Spanish NALS. What would be the purpose of a national survey using Spanish as the language of assessment?

Issues in Task (Item) Development. What would the tasks/items look like? Would they be translations of the current tasks/items? What "Spanish" would be used in the items? What would be the content, structure, and nature of the tasks?

Spanish NALS Relationship to Other ETS Assessments. How would a Spanish version of the NALS "equate" or "relate" to other national assessments using similar constructs? How would Spanish items on the three literacy scales i.e., prose, document, quantitative, relate to items from the English NALS version.

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[3] A full listing of seminar participants is provided in the Appendix section of this paper.

Issues Related to Pretesting & Sampling. Who would be sampled? Latinos only? Spanish speakers only? Total population?

Issues Related to Scaling. Would Spanish language tasks distribute on the three (prose, document, quantitative) NALS scales similarly to English tasks; and if so, how would they relate to each other?

Although several of these issues overlapped, we tried to identify elements specifically related to each category. Further, participants spent more time on purposes (bilingual, Spanish assessment); nature of tasks (translations of current tasks or contextual to Spanish speaking population); and sampling (all Spanish speakers no matter what race/ethnicity, all Latinos, all Spanish speaking Latinos); than on the other categories (e.g., Item Response Theory and scaling).

These categories were organized into a ***Participant Feedback Form*** where seminar participants wrote comments on each section. Thus, even though participants didn't cover each category in equal depth during the discussion, they were still able to write their comments on the ***Participant Feedback Form*** (See Appendix).

III. Results of Discussion on a Spanish National Adult Literacy Survey

As described above, five themes were identified as discussion starters for the seminar:

1. Purposes and Uses of Spanish NALS
2. Issues in Task (Item) Development
3. Spanish NALS Relationship to Other ETS Assessments
4. Issues Related to Pretesting & Sampling
5. Issues Related to Scaling

Each section is reviewed below.

1. Purposes and Uses of Spanish NALS

This topic received a lot of attention at the seminar. All were in agreement that a Spanish "version" of NALS would be a significant and valuable undertaking. Practitioners and researchers alike saw the value of such an assessment and its positive impact not only on the nation's ABE and ESL programs, but for society in general. The discussion that followed represented various points of view. This issue was discussed from the perspective of practitioners, policy makers, researchers and program evaluators.

PRACTITIONERS

Practitioners were concerned with how such an assessment would help in establishing better instructional programs and developing appropriate curriculum. In this light, participants mentioned a variety of purposes that a Spanish NALS could serve. Even though we asked participants to "brainstorm" on possible uses of a Spanish version of the NALS, it obviously could not serve all of the purposes proposed in this section. Nonetheless all suggestions are presented.

Participants pointed out that a Spanish NALS assessment could be used to make curriculum placement decisions or assist in designing instruction. In the latter case, much of the grammar-based ESL materials could be replaced or supplemented by more demanding cognitive skill-based materials if assessments showed high levels of native language literacy. This means that a Spanish NALS could provide information about the placement of adults in native language curriculums/materials.

Such an assessment could also assist practitioners with ESL placement concerns. For example, one participant wondered if such an assessment could answer the question, "When is an ESL student no longer an ESL student?" In this case, such an assessment could inform providers on how to transfer from native language instruction to second language (i.e., English) instruction.

Determining the effects of first language on second language acquisition was considered an important by-product of a Spanish NALS. For instance, the Spanish NALS could assist practitioners "in determining the role of primary language literacy development on second language acquisition." Thresholds could be established in the native language that indicate the learner is ready for transitioning to English language tasks.

The topic of code-switching came up and its implications for designing instruction. In this case, determining language dominance was considered important, however, the simultaneous use of two languages was viewed as an intriguing concept warranting further examination. The potential of a "biliterate assessment" using the NALS constructs were explored considering the impact of code-switching.

Participants mentioned using the Spanish NALS as a Spanish language assessment in order to determine literacy levels in Spanish. This concept is similar to the current purpose of the NALS, which is to determine the English literacy levels of America's adult population. By using the current NALS framework, Spanish language literacy could be determined using tasks (possibly with similar text processing demands) from the prose, document and quantitative scales to determine native language literacy levels.

In sum, practitioners (i.e., literacy service providers) saw the potential of a Spanish NALS to inform curriculum decisions and in some cases drive the curriculum by focusing on relevant real-life tasks and materials. The assessment was seen as providing in-depth information for native language literacy instruction and ESL instruction. In fact, the assessment could inform research by providing data on how native language literacy affects second language development. Finally, participants saw the potential of the Spanish NALS in determining the *literacy levels* of Spanish speaking adults.

Policy Makers

This section discusses the importance of a Spanish NALS for policy-makers. Generally, participants felt that a Spanish NALS can impact several areas e.g., civil service, health, social services, education, etc. Participants agreed that a Spanish version of the NALS would be beneficial, however, most noted several key issues. The key issues centered around the idea that a *storyline* was important to present the idea to the American public.

For example, one could argue that in times of national (or state) *emergencies*, instructions and/or *safety procedures* would need to be made available to the public. It would be necessary for government officials as well as social workers, doctors, and civil service staff to have an idea of the language

capacities of the communities affected so they could communicate emergency procedures effectively to them.

Secondly, participants felt that literacy should be viewed as a *national resource*. In this case, literacy in any language would be regarded as meaningful and a potential resource for a productive (e.g., working) community. By assessing native language literacy, one could get a better understanding not only of the nature of our language resources, but also begin to examine the "untapped" language resources in America as well.

Along this same line is the idea of *access* for non-English speaking adults to community/national resources and their full participation in society. For example, one crucial area relating to participation in society is voting. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 -- recently extended by the House and Senate -- provides for voting ballots in a non-English language if "5% of the voting age citizens share a single foreign language, their literacy rate is lower that the national average and the Census Bureau finds that they have limited proficiency in English."

Further, biliteracy can be seen as valuable in bridging the gap between monolinguals, promoting multicultural understanding among Americans, as well as being a valuable personal asset. Therefore, knowing the extent of the American population that speak more than one language would be one way to gauge our nation's language/literacy resources.

Educational policy makers would be interested in determining how Spanish literacy levels impact second language literacy and/or biliteracy. This was discussed briefly above in the *Practitioner* section. Literacy providers would have a wealth of knowledge regarding curriculum development and instructional methodologies if they could assess not only native language literacy (i.e., Spanish), but better understand the underlying cognitive skills associated with each level of literacy, and how these skills transfer to the second language.

Participants noted that estimating language literacy would have an impact on jobs as well. Generally, more and more of the workforce is becoming non-English speaking -- especially in the southwest United States. Ascertaining the extent of workers' literacy levels is a major step in our understanding of the workforce literacy and job training needs. One seminar participant specializing in developing workplace training materials for non-English speaking workers found the idea of a Spanish assessment for adults important and relevant to workplace literacy programs. In this context, with the demographic characteristics of the workforce changing, we would need to broaden our understanding of literacy to include literacy in other languages, and determine the extent to which this information can inform instruction, training, materials development, and assessment.

Knowing the extent of language resources could also affect the economic well-being of businesses as well. More and more we see the multi-national aspect of marketing goods and services, especially in the wake of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the potential growing Spanish language market. As both consumers and workers, non-English speaking adults can make a significant contribution to the U.S. economy.

In sum, policy makers felt they could benefit from a Spanish language adult assessment in order to communicate with non-English speaking persons relative to health-related issues, or in assisting victims of natural catastrophes (e.g., earthquakes). Further, such an assessment could assist policy makers in making informed decisions about funding adult literacy programs for the limited English speaking (e.g.,

language emphasis relating to ESL teaching methodologies), and informing workplace literacy instructional approaches. [4] Finally, with the NAFTA agreement a reality, bilingualism could have a positive economic impact on future business ventures in the United States.

Researchers and Program Evaluators

The research concerns included sampling, task design, language of assessment, and the issue of biliteracy. These areas are discussed in detail in the next section.

2. Issues in Task (Item) Development

Research on several adult literacy assessments conducted by ETS (Young Adult Literacy Survey, Job Training Partnership Act -- Employment Service/Unemployment Insurance, National Adult Literacy Survey) suggest that task difficulty is determined by at least three features: *content*, *structure*, and *purpose* (Kirsch, 1993). Since the Spanish tasks would probably share some general constructs of the current NALS, it would be important to consider these aspects relative to the Spanish version. They are reviewed below.

Content

A point that came up often during the seminar was the idea that test developers need to consider the "language" and cultural aspects of tasks when constructing new ones in other languages. This aspect relates to the type of materials selected for the assessment tasks. The important point expressed was that materials be common to the experiences of the Spanish speaking group taking the assessments. The extent to which they are unfamiliar with the materials could increase the difficulty levels of the items.

Structure

Similar to content, the familiarity of the structure or format of the materials could cause tasks to be difficult. Currently the NALS provides various formats relative to prose tasks (dense text, text with headers and other organizers); document tasks (applications, different types of lists and tables, schedules, forms); and quantitative tasks (coupons, bill summaries, pay check stubs). These various formats were selected to replicate the types of text processing demands that adults in the United States come into contact.

For Spanish speaking adults, Spanish language materials might have to be formatted differently to coincide with their unique characteristics. This may or may not be a problem -- however, locating materials that have the varying formats represented in every day life would certainly be a goal for this assessment.

The context of the tasks could also affect the format. The current NALS contains tasks from several life-related areas (e.g., work, home, community), and each setting contains materials that present different formats. With this in mind, one participant suggested that the Spanish NALS include "a number of items from all three categories (i.e., prose, documents, quantitative) within one context and equivalent items in other contexts, [then] select one context (e.g., recreation) and move across contexts to determine

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[4] ETS has recently completed a report that begins to address this issue titled: ***Beyond the School Doors, 1992***

ability to transfer." The point here is that the context of the Spanish literacy tasks could determine the make-up or format of the prose samples, documents or quantitative demands; thus, these *contexts* must also be familiar to the Spanish speaking respondents. The ability to transfer across contexts would be an interesting research question to pursue.

PURPOSE

The demands for processing text vary from context to context. Sometimes adults have to merely match information from the question to the text which is identical or synonymous. In other cases, adults have to make inferences based on the text to successfully complete the task. The demands made on the adult to process text are related to task difficulty. With this in mind, seminar participants were asked to elaborate on the nature of the tasks in the case of the Spanish NALS.

Generally, participants felt that the demands of the tasks be similar to the demands that the Spanish speaking population are confronted with in their daily lives. One participant noted that the assessment should, "use Spanish in contexts which are natural to Spanish (not translated in from English items that would not occur in Spanish). There may be certain task demands that occur in only English language situations (or only in the United States) that do not have the same importance or purpose in Spanish.

LANGUAGE

The language of the assessment was pretty much obvious in one sense -- Spanish However, there are other Spanish-speaking countries represented in the United States. Although their numbers do not compare to Mexico's, they nonetheless speak Spanish with variations in vocabulary and usage. Consequently, determining the "type" of Spanish to use for task development could be a complex matter. However, it is clear from recent U.S. Census data that the largest Spanish-speaking country represented in the U.S. is Mexico, and depending on the sampling design, "Spanish" representative of this group would probably be the most appropriate. In either case, the challenge would be to make the Spanish language selected for the assessment comprehensible to most -- if not all -- Spanish speaking respondents.

The discussion also covered the perspective of "allowing for responses in either language (Spanish or English)." Further, suggestions were made that "code switching" (simultaneously changing from one language to another) should be permitted to display comprehension in whichever language [respondents] are most comfortable." The group discussed the logistical problems of such an assessment such as scoring and interpreting results.

Having the tasks printed in two languages -- perhaps side-by-side -- was raised as a possibility." In this case, respondents could decide in which language they preferred to respond. The notion of a locator test was suggested to determine language dominance -- and the language of subsequent assessment tasks.

In sum, seminar participants felt that Issues in Task Development were very important ones to address and specifics and logistics still needed to be ironed-out. Generally, participants recommended that Spanish language tasks contain content that would be familiar to a Spanish speaking population and not mere translations of English tasks; that the format also be diverse and familiar to Spanish speaking adults *vis a vis* the content; that the purpose and demands of the tasks be consistent with demands that Spanish speaking adults face in their daily lives; and finally, that the Spanish language selected for the

assessment be suitable (comprehensible) to all Spanish speakers. In this latter case, proper translations for each Latino sub-population (e.g., Salvadoreño, Puerto Riqueño) was considered important, yet the logistics for implementing this idea still needed further examination.

3. Spanish NALS Relationship to Other ETS Assessments

ETS has conducted three major adult literacy surveys within the past decade: Young Adult Literacy Survey (YALS), 1986; Beyond The School Doors (JTPA/UI/ES), 1992; National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), 1993. These ETS adult literacy assessments share several characteristics. They all have three literacy scales, they use open-ended tasks, they contain real-life materials and text-processing demands that one encounters in daily situations, and they share the same definition of literacy -- which ultimately guides the nature of the assessment. The definition is as follows:

> *"Using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential."*

Additionally, each of the ETS adult literacy assessments have been linked by using a subset of YALS tasks. In this case, comparisons of cohorts relative to various demographic characteristics have been made.

Since a Spanish language version of the NALS could share several characteristics of these previous adult literacy assessments, including the definition of literacy, there may be an opportunity to link tasks from the scales, or explore the relationship between the different language tasks relative to their position on the three literacy scales.

SPANISH NALS/CURRENT NALS

The current NALS structure relative to the three literacy scales i.e., prose, document, and quantitative, would be beneficial for a Spanish version. This is not to limit the discussion of whether to add a written scale, and/or an oral language proficiency scale. In the former case, work has been initiated in scoring adult writing samples in the Spanish language (Solórzano, 1990). In the latter case, the Young Adult Literacy Survey (Kirsch & Jungeblut, 1986) contained oral language tasks organized to represent "different communication demands." Gathering oral language proficiency skill data from adults is made easier with surveys that include face-to-face interviews such as the NALS. In either case, the areas mentioned above could assist others in planning non-English writing and oral language assessments.

If the Spanish NALS were to share many of the constructs of the current NALS, it would be beneficial to the discussion of biliteracy to analyze the Spanish tasks along the various difficulty levels from the three literacy scales to determine their relationship to similar English NALS tasks.

This sentiment was echoed by one seminar participant who suggested the need to "devise metrices/methods to assure comparability and feasibility of studying/assessing biliteracy, or a literacy that may be context dependent rather than language dependent only."

Department of Labor (DOL) Study
JTPA ES/UI Report

This study consisted of a national sample of adults who were participants in the **JTPA** (Job Training Partnership Act), **ES** (Employment Services), and **UI** (Unemployment Insurance) programs. Data from this survey included profiles of adults' literacy skills from different *occupations* as well as educational, and demographic areas.

Tasks containing text processing demands similar to those in this survey could be developed and results compared across scales, occupations, and language groups of adults. Various text processing demands associated with particular jobs can be identified and subsequent job training materials developed to coincide with these demands.

Young Adult Literacy Survey (YALS)

In 1986 ETS conducted the first large-scale assessment of Young Adults using the three literacy scale constructs (Kirsch & Jungeblut, 1986). As mentioned earlier, that assessment included the same guiding definition of adult literacy that the current NALS uses. In this case, the Spanish NALS might compare a 21-25 year old *Spanish speaking cohort* to those in the 1986 YALS study. Further, the oral language assessment used in this survey could also be explored as a basis for generating an oral language bilingual assessment.

In sum, the potential linkages that such a Spanish NALS assessment can make to previous national studies using similar constructs (Young Adult Literacy Survey, 1986; Beyond the School Doors, 1992; National Adult Literacy Survey, 1992), could be beneficial. For this reason, there would be reason to explore the interrelatedness between Spanish and English versions of the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS). Ultimately it would be beneficial to explore the similarity of text processing demands in two languages and identify the underlying cognitive (and metacognitive) skills associated with tasks at various levels on the three scales. This type of an analysis could have a profound impact on curriculum development in adult education programs and workplace-based training programs.

4. Issues Related to Pretesting & Sampling of Spanish NALS

Identifying Field Test Group

Identifying the field test group -- and eventually the national sample group -- is basic to the goals of the Spanish NALS assessment. Seminar participants asked: "Who do we sample? All Latinos? Only LEP Latinos? All adults including Anglos who might speak Spanish?" Is this a national sample of Latinos' Spanish language capacities? Or, all American's capacities to speak Spanish? Some seminar participants felt that this assessment should be an assessment of America's language resources, while others felt it would be beneficial to assess "biliteracy" capacities of the Spanish speaking population.

These are very important issues. As one seminar participant put it: "Who is the 'Spanish' speaker?" Another participant suggested that we "... design [the] study and sample either to assess Spanish literacy or assess Spanish and English literacy i.e., test entire sample in Spanish or test entire sample (or sub-sample) in both Spanish and English (except for individuals who report no proficiency in one)." It appeared that several participants did not want to sample a "program specific" group (i.e., ESL adult learners), but rather to include a broader sample that would represent all of those who speak Spanish

(e.g., to include non-Hispanic).

After much discussion, one theme that emerged was that the sample should be inclusive and representative of the American population. In this case, a sample stratified by certain language groups could be designed but allowing for all Americans to be represented.

Data Bases for Sampling

Probably the most comprehensive and most used data base in the country is the U.S. Census. The current NALS sampling sub-contractor (WESTSTAT) uses the Census data base for sampling and weighting. The Spanish NALS would also use the Census data base for stratifying the sample by population and language group. In the latter case, it would be important to determine the extent to which non-Hispanics speak Spanish and sample/stratify accordingly. The Census contains information on language spoken by race/ethnicity as well as self-reported data on literacy levels in the non-English language. One caveat to using the Census data is the underrepresentation of Latinos -- especially the undocumented.

Administration of Spanish NALS Items

Since the Spanish NALS would be a direct assessment of Spanish language literacy levels, a household survey conducted by interview would be recommended. In this case however, interviewers conversant in both English and Spanish would be needed. The tasks would probably share many of the characteristics of the current NALS survey -- that is -- that they be open-ended and use simulated real-life tasks from several life-related contexts (e.g., home, community, work) that measure a broad range of information processing skills.

Use of Bilingual Interviewers

As mentioned above, the use of interviewers conversant in both English and Spanish would be necessary. Bilingual interviewers could be used to "screen" respondents who are not able to take the assessment in Spanish; or in the case of a bilingual assessment, that they administer the tasks in both languages.

The sample design of the Spanish NALS is the centerpiece of the assessment. Determining *who* will be assessed frames the Spanish literacy issue. If one wants to address the issue of literacy among Spanish speakers, then sampling the Spanish speaking population only would be appropriate. If one wants to address the extent of Spanish use and literacy in America, then a stratified sampling procedure including all Americans could be used. Finally, if one wants to address the issue of biliteracy, then tasks need to be presented bilingually in a format (possibly English and Spanish tasks side-by-side) that allows respondents to answer in both languages. The use of bilingual interviewers during the administration of the tasks would be an important consideration in either case.

5. Issues Related to Scaling

The seminar group did not address the issues of scaling in any direct manner. In a general sense, participants recommended that "comparisons" be made between the Spanish NALS tasks and the current English NALS tasks.

Although participants did not address these issues directly, for purposes of this discussion paper, a brief discussion of the issues will be presented.

IRT Methods and Equating

The Item Response Theory (IRT) methods employed in the NALS would be suitable to a Spanish version and probably necessary to conduct any equating analyses to the current NALS. Some work has been done in this area. For example, a study was conducted by ETS that attempted to equate the Prueba de Aptitud Académica (PAA) with the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) (Angoff & Cook, 1988). These tests are given to similar respondents (secondary school students), however, one test is administered in English (SAT), and the other (PAA) in Spanish. This study can shed some light on the problems that can arise in bilingual equating.

A number of issues about equating and translations across languages were raised during this investigation. For example, regarding "conversion of scores" between the PAA and the SAT the authors state:

> *"Although the study of cultural differences has been of central interest to educators and social psychologists for many years, attempts to develop a deeper understanding of such differences have been frustrated by the absence of a common metric by which many such comparisons could be made. The reasons for this are clear. If two cultural groups differ from each other in certain ways that cast doubt on the validity of direct comparisons between them in other respects -- if, for example, they differ sharply in language, custom, and values -- then those very differences also will defy the construction of an unbiased metric by which we could hope to make such comparisons." (p. 134-135)*

This suggests that care must be taken to insure that tasks be comparable in that the impact of language, custom, and values plays a minor discriminating role across languages.

And regarding translations of the PAA and the SAT and making comparisons between culturally different groups the authors note:

> *"... to provide a measuring instrument to make these comparisons, it is clearly insufficient simply to translate the test constructed for one language group into the language of the other, even with the adjustments in the items to conform to the more obvious cultural requirements of the second group. Nuances of expression and subtleties of custom are unwittingly embodied in words and phrases and often have particular meanings for one group but not for the other. It can therefore hardly be expected, without careful and detailed checks, that the translated items will have the same meaning and relative difficulty for the second group as they had for the original group before translation." (p. 135-136)*

The importance of language in assessment is evidenced in this statement. Language is not something that can be easily manipulated for research and/or comparison purposes. Care must be taken to conscientiously develop language-relevant items (tasks) that minimize language-based interference.

IV. Future Directions and Recommendations

Several national and world-wide changes are taking place as the United States enters the twenty-first century. For example, the face of America is changing. As the past director of the Census Bureau notes, (quoted in Kirsch et. al., 1993), *"If you gave America a face in 1990, it would have shown the first signs of wrinkles [and] it would have been full of color."* Kirsch goes on to say:

> *"Our increasing diversity can not only be seen but also heard: today, some 32 million individuals in the United States speak a language other than English, and these languages range from Spanish and Chinese to Yupik and Mon-Khmer."*

The issue of language can be very political. For example, it can be seen as divisive where people use language differences to separate and prevent individuals from accessing resources and effectively contributing to society. On the other hand, the issue of language can be seen as a resource, where contrary to popular belief, language is used to show how people are *similar* in many respects; that they have the same aspirations for their children, that they want and need many of the same things as English speaking adults and are willing to contribute to the well-being of the United States. All adults bring resources to bear on the well-being of the nation, and language has all of the potential of being a unifying and valuable resource.

Several issues still need to be examined relative to an effort of this type, however, based on the proceedings of the seminar, the following general recommendations are warranted. Seminar participants were not asked to specifically make recommendations, thus the author takes full responsibility for their content.

Include a sampling procedure that is stratified to include all persons in the U.S. but weighted to insure a representative amount of Spanish speakers.

In other words, that the sample not be program or race/ethnic specific, but that all persons in the U.S. who might speak Spanish be sampled -- with assurances of sampling the major source of Spanish speaking adults.

Develop tasks that reflect the Spanish speaking experience, and are not translations of the current NALS tasks.

That the content, format and purpose of the tasks be consistent with what Spanish speaking persons in the U.S. might be confronted with in their daily lives.

Develop metrics that allow for future comparisons of the Spanish NALS with previous national adult literacy surveys.

> That Spanish tasks on the three literacy scales be comparable to English tasks that contain similar text processing demands contained in previous studies. Or, that methods be developed to determine the similarities of the two assessments.

The first recommendation addresses language use as a national resource rather than divisive based on race or a particular program (e.g., ESL). The second recommendation recognizes the uniqueness of the Spanish language relative to content and structure, and warns against simplistic comparison/equating methodologies. The third recommendation attempts to contrast the text processing demands -- and thus difficulty levels -- between English and Spanish in order to determine potential transference of skills, bilinguality and literacy instruction.

No doubt there are other issues and recommendations that can and will be proposed as discussions and perhaps the reality of a Spanish NALS becomes evident. The spirit of this paper is to share the ideas from a respected group of practitioners, researchers, and policy makers relative to an effort of this magnitude, and to raise important issues. This paper ultimately suggests that continued dialogue regarding the issues raised is necessary to embark on this important assessment venture.

APPENDICES

I. Bibliography

II. Listing of Seminar Participants

III. Participation Feedback Form

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Spanish NALS Seminar Participants
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Spanish NALS Seminar Participant Feedback Form
ETS (SCFO) May, 1992

Spanish NALS
Chart 1

Purpose and Uses of Spanish NALS			
Practitioners	*Policy Makers*	*Researchers & Evaluators*	*Others*
Who: How:			

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Spanish NALS
Chart 2

Issues in Task (item) Development			
Content	*Format*	*Purpose*	*Language*
Others:			

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Spanish NALS
Chart 3

Spanish NALS Relationship to Other ETS Assessments			
Spanish NALS	*Current NALS*	*Test of Applied Literacy Skills (TALS)*	*Department of Labor (DOL)*
Other:			

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Spanish to NALS
Chart 5

Issues Related to Scaling		
IRT Methods	***Equating***	***Other***
Other:		

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Spanish NALS
Chart 4

Issues Related to Pretesting & Sampling			
Identifying Field Test group	*Data Bases for Sampling (Census)*	*Administration of Spanish NALS Items*	*Bilingual Interviewers*
Other:			